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Address by
 M. Justin Herman
 Executive Director
 San Francisco Redevelopment Agency
 at
 Civic Luncheon, Vallejo, California
 January 30, 1965 in connection with
 groundbreaking ceremonies for

MARINA VISTA

Vallejo is justifiably happy with the progress marked by groundbreaking

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MARINA VISTA

Vallejo is justifiably happy with the progress marked by groundbreaking ceremonies this morning in Marina Vista. You citizens of Vallejo should be proud that in what is a short period of time for renewal processes you have reached the first stages of construction. You are also justified in your conviction of the benefits which will accrue in the future as more land is sold and structure after structure is started.

Under the leadership that you have had from City officials, the City Council, and your Redevelopment Agency, under the able direction of James D. Richardson, and with the help you have had from the Housing and Home Finance Agency, Urban Renewal Administration and Community Facilities Administration, and many other individuals and organizations too numerous to mention, you are indeed justified in your belief that Marina Vista will go forward to be one of the great assets of the City of Vallejo and Solano County.

I would say nothing today to restrict your enjoyment of this stage of accomplishment or your anticipation of future successes. However, other evaluations at complete variance from your experience and in denial of your anticipation are being presented to the country today. You can not escape the influence of such views, nor should you be indifferent to Vallejo's proof that the urban renewal process does work.

Whose voices are these? What are they saying? How valid are their statements in the face of what we have witnessed getting under way here in Vallejo today?

Some critics maintain that no matter how blighted a neighborhood, and no matter how badly it is abused by some of its residents, or how indifferent they are to its decay as they pass through on the way to other neighborhoods, it is still their home and should be retained for the people resident there. These critics are the exponents of the views of Jane Jacobs. You know her very special Greenwich Village scene, with mamas chatting on the stoops, watching the kids play among the pushcarts and passing trucks. These critics would impose by implication this solution to urban blight on all the communities and neighborhoods of America.

What such critics would have done with the vacancies, the shacks, the decay and the anti-social behavior within the area which is now Marina Vista, I think not even Jane Jacobs could tell us.

There are other critics who believe that the residents and businessmen in blighted areas must organize themselves against the outer community. They must entrench themselves in a strengthened ghetto. The outside community is the enemy. It must be plagued, badgered and attacked until it makes concessions or is frustrated by its inability to concede the impossible. In effect these critics insist that the poor have the right to keep themselves poor and that they have the right to keep the rest of the community poor as well.

Then there are the design critics who find that the structures built in the neighborhoods created by urban renewal are dull or banal. Whereas many a community in its urban renewal program has fallen short of its goals, and has not yet explored fully the potential for good design in renewal processes, no program for American communities in our century has done as much to lift on a broad scale the standards and goals of good design as has the renewal program.



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Consider what you did here to make Marina Vista a delightful area with the design work of Beland, Gianelli & Associates, and Bond and Dougherty, as well as your panel of local architects. As a member of the 1964 Advisory Committee to the Urban Renewal Administration in its Honor Awards Program to select outstanding urban renewal designs, I tell no tales out of school to say that our panel was unanimous in wanting the Marina Vista design submitted when construction is under way.

If urban renewal buildings are so ugly, drive along the Capitol Mall of Sacramento and compare the beauty of that area created by urban renewal with the rest of the city; or drive to Richmond's first residential product, The Plaza, and compare that with other developments in Richmond; or drive to our Golden Gateway Center in San Francisco and walk through its park and plazas and ask where a comparable residential area has been created outside of renewal; or examine the design created for St. Mary's Cathedral to be built in San Francisco's first Western Addition renewal project and ask whether this is a worthy product of renewal.

In greatest current vogue are the writings of Martin Anderson whose book "The Federal Bulldozer" seemingly has been distributed without cost to every columnist who might conceivably fill a column by attacking urban renewal. The book has a deceptive appeal because it is so loaded with statistics, chosen and presented to support his thesis. It is not easy reading, but a summary of Dr. Anderson's views may be found in the Harvard Business Review of January-February 1965. In that article he says, "The basic question is this: should the Federal urban renewal program be continued, expanded, or should it be stopped? I shall argue that it be stopped."

To begin with, the title "Federal Bulldozer" is attention-getting, I grant--but dishonest, none-the-less. It is dishonest because there is no "Federal bulldozer". Anyone who professes to know even a little about urban renewal is aware that it

can never occur except through local ^{initiative} ~~initiative~~ diligently pressed.

The land that was cleared for Marina Vista was cleared because your City Council decided it should be cleared. This is true of other cities. The urban renewal program is a local program.

Professor Anderson makes many charges which are either distorted or invalid. But he is careful. He qualifies his attack by stating that it applies to data "for the period I have studied". He took a 1961 reading. For any period there is a lag in the gathering of statistics for a national program. Since he took a period when the renewal processes were only beginning to deliver the new structures and neighborhoods, he had a field day in describing what had not yet been accomplished! To take a parallel situation, we might condemn in the first year as a failure the five-year building program of a huge dam for the generation of hydro-electric power. We perhaps would find abandoned farms and homes, raw earth, no lake, no wild life, no power generation and then condemn the whole project as a dismal failure!

Anderson says that more homes were destroyed than were built. Of course homes had to be destroyed to make way for the new structures for which construction had not yet had adequate time to get under way.

He says the homes destroyed were predominantly low-rent homes. Surely he did not expect the renewal process to take place in unblighted areas. Who else but the poor are condemned to blighted housing and what other than the urban renewal program can rescue them from it?

He says that the homes built were predominantly of high rent. He forgets that the urban renewal program was only part of a comprehensive housing program of our country as adopted and developed by our cities. Public housing units created for

families of low income in the period chosen by Dr. Anderson for his tale of woe were twice the number of homes destroyed. Is it not significant that here in Vallejo the first housing to replace the shacks that were in Marina Vista is that of the senior citizen housing development, Ascension Arms?

Dr. Anderson goes on to say that housing conditions were made worse for those whose housing conditions were poorest and he also alleges that housing conditions were improved for those whose housing conditions were best. These are either untrue or distorted. The national audited figures show that at least 80 percent of the residents of blighted homes were reestablished in standard structures. An independent study made by the University of California conceded that three out of four households of the first Western Addition area project bettered their housing conditions upon reestablishment.

Dr. Anderson who portrays himself as an advocate of an unrestricted free enterprise overlooks the elementary fact that land sold for residential use without special controls in renewal areas will be used in substantial degree by private developers for exploiting the highest priced market. But as soon as legislation was available, redevelopment agencies throughout the country allocated land for the FHA's moderate-priced private housing program. In San Francisco approximately one-third of all the housing programmed to appear in renewal areas will be in this moderate-priced category. The price of such housing will be even lower if Congress elects to reduce the interest rate. This program, government supported as it is with a sub-market interest rate, is not an illustration of Dr. Anderson's concept of free enterprise. But he gives no support to any method for making this program reach even lower income groups than it now can serve.

Dr. Anderson throws off as an idle promise the tax gains anticipated by communities in the renewal process. He concentrates on the interim tax losses. You should

have confidence that your projections of taxes, when Marina Vista is completed, even with so much land devoted to public plazas, park and open spaces, will triple your past tax revenues. In San Francisco's first three projects, with considerable land not yet improved, the assessments are already 40 percent above those of the pre-redevelopment period. Assuming a constancy of tax rates we can look forward to a flow into our City treasury each year of ten to thirteen times the original tax payments.

Dr. Anderson dwells upon land lying idle. Is there any other way of moving from a condition of blight to a condition of reuse without an interim period of idleness? Could Ascension Arms or the Bank of America buildings be started here today without the clearance first of their sites? More practically, would the sponsors have come into this area without the assurance that all blight would be removed and without the promise of other developments to help create a new and attractive neighborhood?

Perhaps the most critical question of all concerning urban renewal is this: Why do the years of idleness of land, its misuse and underuse--such as was the case in the Marina Vista area prior to redevelopment--fail to disturb critics like Dr. Anderson into producing an equally effective solution?

I respect but disagree with those who believe that government is necessarily bad, that public capital should not be used to create foundations for private enterprise. Such critics will not learn the lessons of history and no amount of evidence will dissuade them from the comfort of their beliefs.

I do take issue with those vested property interests who want to hold on to what they have, even though the rest of the community suffers. They've got theirs!

I also take issue with those vested interest who want their own discipline to be the sole determinant of the fate of communities. Some, but not all, of the social planners and sociologists have come into their own with what I would describe as their "love that slum" attitude.

Nor can we be indifferent to the motivations of political strategists who see in the slum a political block with which to swing the vote in a community.

Finally, we are mindful of budgeteers who want to make the local community, already struggling under the antiquated, ad valorem property tax and frustrated with problems that are national, not local, in origin, pay more and more of the bill for regenerating land to new uses within the central city.

The urban renewal program is by no means perfect. It needs improvement. It needs more realistic recognition by the Federal government of what cities are contributing to the process. It needs far less talk and far more legislation in financing mechanisms for the creation of low to moderate-priced housing. It needs far better coordination than it is getting with various Federal aids and which hopefully may be possible under the President's proposal for a Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The people of Vallejo should be proud of what they are doing with Marina Vista. But do not think it just a matter of local accomplishment--somewhat vaguely threaded to a Federal program. Vallejo's experience, admittedly not unique and exclusive, but of a quality and spirit that is worthy of emulation elsewhere, should be told and retold so that the voices of gloom and doom will be silenced, and the voices of those who really want communities to go forward with the better life will speak up with suggestions for technical and financial advances in city, state and Federal legislation.

There is a bigger battle being joined today as you will see in your State legislature and in the Congress, between those committed to defeating and those who want to improve the renewal process. Those who have brought Marina Vista to its present stage of accomplishment and promise need to make their voices heard.

Tell the country about Marina Vista!

* * * *

San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

February 3, 1965

